INSIDE ZELDA

NINTENDO POWER'S MONTHLY CHECK-IN FROM THE ZELDA DEVELOPMENT TEAM.

(Part 10)

THE MONSTERS IN HIS HEAD

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It's got to be nice to bring Link to life, thinking up all of those heroic deeds, imagining valiant actions. But what does it take to summon monsters that stick in your dreams and won't go away? Nintendo designer Yoshiyuki Oyama had that weighty responsibility for Twilight Princess. Although the majority of the game's creatures still lurk in the shadows, Oyama shares his thoughts about monster design this issue, and you never know what you'll see if you look closely enough. Monsters are all around you, according to the designer, who's such a mad genius that it's no surprise that Nintendo used his name for Professor Oyamah (the Japanese version of E. Gadd in the Mario series). He also shares his perspective on what Zelda means to its fans, how Zelda games are inherently different from all other fantasy titles, and why making Zelda games *must* be unlike anything the development world usually dares to do.

THINKING ORGANICALLY

I've always loved drawing and playing video games, so it seems like a no-brainer that I'd want to work in the gaming industry, but there's a lot more to it than that. I knew that I wanted to have some kind of creative job, whether working as an independent artist or for a company, but I headed into gaming so that my work could be seen by people all over the world. Correction: not just seen, but also "touched" through gaming controllers! The more that someone can be drawn into an artistic creation—through direct experience and touching—the better they can judge for *themselves* whether it turned out good or bad. In the art world and in other creative trades, specialists are the ones who usually tell us whether something has high quality. But I want to help people get *directly* connected to the creative world, and that's possible in video games. I'm very particular about the sensation and feeling of touch in my own creations, and that's one of the major reasons that I love that Nintendo is pursuing a far deeper connection with players on the DS and the upcoming Revolution.

But how did I end up conjuring the monsters for Twilight Princess? My first position with Nintendo was working on Majora's Mask, where I designed Mikau, the Zora band's guitarist, and the supermuscular Mountain Smithy that hones Link's sword. After I did some 3-D modeling for the minigame mode in Pokémon Stadium, I had a great opportunity to do

Oyama did some creature design for Luigi's Mansion and also created the look for Professor E. Gadd.

creature design for Luigi's Mansion, the first time I designed enemies and monsters. Since the enemies and the battle system were so unique in Luigi's Mansion, I created the ghosts with a much stronger sense of individual personality than seen in most games. In addition, I created a new character for the Mario world, the highly eccentric inventor who's known as Professor Elvin Gadd in North America. Personally, I was hoping that he would show up in Mario Kart DS, but at least he had a big part in Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time!

Soon after my time with Luigi's Mansion, I joined the Wind Waker team. Zelda fans have a wealth of interesting opinions about The Wind Waker. From a creator's standpoint, it was an unbelievably exciting project that brimmed with character design. Of my contributions to The Wind Waker, I'd have to say that the minigame-peddler Salvatore was my favorite. Originally, the game plan had the concept of a submarine minigame. The minigame itself wasn't going to be too difficult, so we wanted to add more liveliness to the event somehow. I got some input that we should see if we could bring more story to the minigame through the use of character dialog and picture cards. So I let my imagination run with those notions, plus some ventriloquism ideas. I thought that maybe the minigame guy should be sort of a swindler, somewhat middle-aged and skinny. The development staff

Oyama's first project with Nintendo was Majora's Mask, where he put the rock star into Mikau.

Welcome to zee fleet! I am zee great Admiral Dolvalskii! Look sharp, for vee are zee sole protectors of zis island!

One of The Wind Waker's strangest characters, Salvatore, was designed by Oyama, who brought the minigame peddler's bizarre communication to life.

really liked my proposal, and after other people added in his unique voice and accessories, the mysterious Salvatore was born!

To me, the Zelda series itself reflects what Zelda development is like. Unlike other adventures, Zelda games don't follow fantasy's traditionally linear, majestic story path that ultimately leads to a royal climax. Zelda is not such a simple fantasy. Many people lump Ocarina of Time in with traditional fantasies, but I just don't see it that way. So many individual mysteries are scattered throughout Ocarina and other

Zelda titles. Which reflects how we develop for the series. At the beginning of a project, we don't have One Big Idea totally set in stone. Everyone thinks about a variety of ideas, and the project moves forward more organically as people absorb all of the fresh thinking. We find that we get inspirations from sharing this and that, and whether we think something new might be a "Zelda idea" or not. Of course, we don't have unlimited development time, so as much as we enjoy open-minded thinking, we eventually need to balance that with reaching closure.

But I strongly believe this process is integral to what creates the unique feeling of a Zelda game.

IN CHARGE OF TWILIGHT'S EVILS

I wasn't in charge of monster design at the start of Twilight Princess development. I was working with player-controlled characters, such as Link. But when we suddenly needed more people for monster design, I was put on the monster team. I've designed many of the enemies that you've already seen, such as the horseback riders and their lance-wield-

ing boss. What's interesting about development of monsters for Twilight Princess is that I want to be careful to summon creatures that entertain both Zelda fans and new players who've never played Zelda games before. They should appeal on some level to those who are fond of the series; however, I'd like them to have entirely fresh surprises, too! Yet I'd also like them to have thrills that echo the past, so they have feelings like "I *know* this! I can do it!" and "Holy cow! *This* is how you brought it back for Twilight Princess? Awesome!"

I also focus on creating

enemies that perfectly fit the environments. And here's where the idea of what Twilight Princess's style *really* is comes in. Some have misunderstood it as "photorealistic Zelda," but it's actually "realistic Zelda." And by realism, we mean that it is really important that players get a very realistic sense that they're deep in the game, which involves more effects than mere *photorealism*. This is more complicated than you might think when it comes to monster design. I try to be very careful to create monsters that enhance the sense and pacing of adventure in each phase of the game. For example, let's say you've just beaten a small enemy. Later on, you should possibly meet with the same kind of foe but larger. If you continue to beat those, you should eventually meet up with a massive version of the creatures. This kind of progression helps create a story-like feeling, even when simply battling through levels.

Here's another example that draws on the horseback

riders that you've seen. I'd like to show what kind of language or communication they use, and what life back at their base is like. But if these details get pushed too often on players, they might wind up bored. So it's key to be brief about such things so it stays interesting and fun, and becomes part of gameplay.

Something we consider in Zelda boss design is that the item that you find in a particular stage is often the key for defeating its boss. To a certain degree, Twilight Princess is following that classic idea. After all, we'd like to create situations in which players try to use items, especially if the item was hard to find. Ultimately, fantasy adventures usually don't require much more than a sword, shield, bow, and occasionally bombs. But Zelda offers much more item diversity, and that's what's made the series uniquely alluring for

players. So we really try to incorporate item-minded ideas into the final boss designs.

Finally, no discussion of Twilight Princess's enemies can end without mentioning Ganon. I know that everyone's wondering what going on with Link's old nemesis. All I can say now is, we're preparing more than you could possibly ever, ever, ever expect . . . and to stay tuned for more details.

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

Inspirations for monster designs can come from really diverse places, and I enjoy taking cues from nature and living creatures! I like reading books about the habits of animals and chewing on all that in discussions. Though I might also take some inspiration from movies, perhaps even the people that I work

Between interests for his new French bulldog and fishing, Oyama has plenty of natural source material for making his monsters.

with, it often comes back to nature. It's all endlessly amazing.

When I'm not at work, I usually don't stick close to home, but instead head out for the great outdoors. In addition to snowboarding, I also like to go fishing. Kazuaki Morita, the programmer who talked

Twilight Princess with you last issue, is a good friend, and we often go fishing together. When I am at home, I enjoy spending time with my French bulldog. Given my interests in learning about nature and living creatures, it's no surprise that I've now become a major dog-lover.

Like I mentioned earlier, Zelda development is all about absorbing many people's inspirations, opinions, ideas, and even personalities as we go forward. Since Twilight Princess's development team is so enormous, there's an ever greater challenge of reaching creative consensus! But even though that's the case now, the importance of teamwork has never been more vital. Each individual's contributions are very important; but each per-

son always needs to think about what the whole team is doing.

As we continue to be very hard at work on Twilight Princess, my mind goes back to my visit to E3 in 2004. Just seeing how hyped fans were when they first saw what we were up to really inspires me every day. Since this game's development definitely exceeds that of Ocarina of Time and The Wind Waker, thinking about how invested the series' fans are keeps me focused on how important Twilight Princess is. And how will my monsters ensure that Twilight Princess is the greatest Zelda game ever? Wait and see. You won't be disappointed.

Zelda games are characterized by their unique items, such as Twilight Princess's Gale Boomerang. Oyama says that such items are a major part of developing engaging foes.

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